



Families Helping Families Fund – Albemarle County

434-260-1079

familieshf@gmail.com

www.albemarlefhf.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Monday, May 2, 2022

CONTACT: Heidi Gilman Bennett, FHFlovesACPSteachers@gmail.com

Albemarle community comes together to support over 1,000 educators with Families Helping Families

Charlottesville, VA -- As Teacher Appreciation Week kicks off nationally, Albemarle teachers are learning how much their community cares.

In response to unprecedented challenges for educators and unusually high levels of teacher exhaustion, the local nonprofit Families Helping Families has coordinated donations and volunteers in a major push to ensure recognition for every Albemarle County Public Schools teacher.

Falling in the first full week of May, Teacher Appreciation Week is typically a time for families and parent organizations to shower thank-you notes, gifts and donations on teachers at their schools. However, with varying levels of family resources from school to school, not every school – and not every teacher – enjoys these marks of appreciation equally. “Schools with higher percentages of low-income families have lower amounts of PTO funding and volunteer hours,” explained Amanda Alger, Co-President, Families Helping Families. “Yet those teachers are sometimes at highest risk of leaving the profession. If we want every teacher to feel appreciated, teachers need to be receiving that message of gratitude in every school.”

That’s why Families Helping Families decided to take action. “We had modest fundraising goals, but ambitious plans for what we would do,” recounted Heidi Gilman Bennett, volunteer. “We started by rallying volunteers and working with existing parent groups, and we set an early fundraising goal of \$4,500 based on \$5 per teacher.”

Those efforts paid off well beyond their early expectations. Families Helping Families has raised over \$6,000 from generous community members, and saw unexpected support from local groups, such as Crutchfield, which donated raffle prizes; FlyDog Yoga, which donated in-person classes held at schools; and the Stone-Robinson PTO, which made a donation of funds. Explaining why Stone-Robinson families and the PTO made the donation, Akanksha Meyer, President, said, “As members of the Stone-Robinson PTO, we see the benefits first hand of PTO involvement within the school. We strive for the SRE community, along with our broader community, to feel supported and engaged, which is beneficial for us all.”

The results have been impressive. Teacher workrooms at three large schools are flooded with snacks and “thank you” posters. Funds to support teacher appreciation efforts were shared with PTOs at seven schools in which low-income families make up over 40% of the enrollments. Over 500 thank you cards were hand-written by volunteers for virtual and substitute teachers. ACPS teachers at Ivy Creek School, CATEC, Post High and Blue Ridge Detention Center also received notes with emotional thank you’s from community members, plus gift cards to local businesses.

And teachers say these efforts matter. “As teachers we are continuously planting seeds,” said Vada Holcomb, a teacher of Health and Medical Sciences at Albemarle High School for 16 years. “Nothing is more inspiring

than to see those seeds grow and produce fruit. Being appreciated for what we do makes that fruit even sweeter.” Emily Holstrom, a guidance counselor at Agnor-Hurt Elementary School, also weighed in. “This upcoming week will be so meaningful to teachers -- I hope they’ll feel turbo-charged and completely revitalized for their students for this homestretch of the school year,” she said. “The fact that community members have the energy and the thought and the time to take on such a huge project is completely incredible!”

Dawn Monroe, a member of the Albemarle High School community, has observed the effects of the strain on teachers and notes that this acknowledgement from community members can go a long way. “Teachers and school staff have truly been stretched the past several years, and though students were back in the building this school year, it was far from ‘normal.’ To see community members’ love for their school staff is not only heartwarming, but validating for all of the hard work and long hours staff have given.”

This is just the start of Teacher Appreciation Week, so feel-good moments should continue to brighten the school day all week long. But when the week is over, Families Helping Families won’t be finished with their work. “As a nonprofit dedicated to supporting our community, Families Helping Families will continue to work with teachers, schools, and families, and try to tip the scales of inequity,” Alger said. “ We’re thrilled that we’ve helped make Teacher Appreciation Week special, after two very hard years. But we’re not done yet.”

The work to support schools and teachers is ongoing; visit <https://gofundme.com/acps-teachers> to donate. Families Helping Families Fund is a registered 501(c)(3) organization. To learn more about Families Helping Families, visit www.albemarlefhf.org.

###